

NEWS BULLETIN

APRIL 2026



BUSINESS & PROPERTY UPDATES

[VendiCards](#) will be opening on May 4 at their new location at 49 N. Main Street. Previously located at 74 S. Main Street. Owner Logan Rihn founded VendiCards with a passion for the Pokémon Trading Card Game and a commitment to serving the collector community. What started as a love for the hobby has grown into a comprehensive destination for collectors. Offering everything from sealed products and raw cards to graded gems, custom merchandise, and professional card services.

[The Big Garlic](#) is now open at The Big Garlic is now open at 213 S. Main. Owned by Tony and Desiray Rockweit, this marks the couple's second location, with their original restaurant based in Stevens Point. Stop in and try their famous garlic cheese burgers, garlic aioli fries and more! The DFP supported this project through an Experience Generator Grant and Building Improvement Grant, with a Creative Sign Grant currently pending.

SPECIAL EVENT NEWS

UPCOMING SPECIAL EVENTS

- **Downtown Derby Day** – Saturday, May 2, an all-day Kentucky Derby themed promotional event, featuring specials at 15 downtown businesses.
- **Beer & Bourbon Crawl** – Saturday, May 2, from 1-5:00pm. 79 of 250 tickets are still available as of April 27. 12 businesses are participating.
- The 2026 **Farmers Market**, presented by SSM Health, will run from May 16-October 31, 2026 from 8am-12pm. The [Farmers Market Vendor Application](#) is now available online. All downtown businesses are eligible for one free 10x10 space. We are close to reaching capacity so please apply if you'd like to secure your space!
We are seeking volunteers to serve on the [Friends of the Farmers Market](#) team as either a Welcome Booth Ambassador or in Operations Support. Please contact [Kristin](#) for more information.
- **Fondue Fest**, presented by Fox Valley Savings Bank, is being planned for Saturday, September 12, 2026, 9am-5pm. The [Fondue Fest Vendor Application](#) is now available online. All downtown businesses are eligible for one free 10x10 space.



SPECIAL EVENT RECAPS

- **The Easter Egg Walk** was held on Saturday, March 28, presented by Zellner Real Estate. 200 tickets sold out two days prior to the event. 21 businesses participated.
- **The Spring Wine Walk** was Saturday, April 18 from noon-5:00pm, presented by National Exchange Bank and Trust. 600 tickets sold out the morning of the event. 16 businesses participated.

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ANNUAL SPECIAL EVENT REVIEW

The DFP Marketing Committee is currently conducting a comprehensive evaluation of all annual special events to assess how well they align with organizational goals and support a broad range of downtown businesses. The objective is to create a strategic event calendar that delivers the greatest overall impact for the downtown district.

As part of this process, a survey was distributed to downtown businesses that have participated in events. The feedback received has been extremely valuable in guiding planning and decision-making.

Final decisions regarding the 2026 Special Events Calendar will be made in early July. In the meantime, the following potential changes are under consideration:

1. **Christmas Cookie Walk & Sweet Stroll** – These events are being reevaluated, as participation tends to be more “grab-and-go,” which may not significantly support retail sales compared to events like Wine Walks or the Chili Crawl, where attendees linger and shop.
2. **Downtown Derby Day** – This event may be combined with the Beer & Bourbon Crawl to streamline offerings and maximize participation.
3. **Beer & Bourbon Crawl** – Participation and ticket sales have been lower than comparable events such as Wine Walks. The committee will evaluate 2026 performance, with consideration given to potentially replacing it with a Wine Walk on the first Saturday in May.
4. **Bags & Bucks** – This event has not gained strong traction and falls during a particularly busy time for businesses, making execution more challenging.
5. **Shop Small and Win \$500 Raffle** – With participation declining in recent years, the committee is assessing whether this promotion has run its course.
6. **New Events** – Moving forward, all proposed new special events will require approval from the DFP Board of Directors to ensure alignment with organizational priorities.

The DFP remains committed to creating events that are vibrant, well-supported, and beneficial to the entire downtown business community.

SOCIAL MEDIA – FREE ASSISTANCE

Looking for assistance with Facebook, Instagram or all of the various online review websites? It’s a lot to manage and can be very overwhelming. Brooke at the DFP can help you better understand social media and their online presence. Brooke will come to your business, working at your pace and knowledge level—to help build confidence and take your online skills to the next level. She can assist with Facebook, Instagram, and overall online presence. Brooke is available **Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays from 8:00**

STAFFING UPDATE

Executive Director Amy Krupp will be retiring effective April 30, 2026 after 18 years of service. Brittany Machleit will serve as Interim Executive Director until a replacement is named. Amy will continue assisting the DFP with grant programs.

Individuals interested in applying for the Executive Director position are encouraged to submit a cover letter and resume to employment@downtownfdl.com. Details on the job position can be found at downtownfdl.com.

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DORA RECOMMENATION – (Designated Outdoor Refreshment Area)

The City of Fond du Lac is seeking input on the potential implementation of a Designated Outdoor Refreshment Area (DORA) in Downtown Fond du Lac.

A DORA allows individuals to purchase alcoholic beverages from participating, licensed establishments and carry them outdoors within a defined district, provided the beverages are served in official DORA cups.

DORA districts are currently operating in several Wisconsin communities, including Oshkosh, Waukesha, Green Bay, Ripon, Sturgeon Bay, Stevens Point, Neenah, Manitowoc, and Sheboygan.

The DFP circulated a community wide survey to help assist with forming a recommendation to the city. The following recommendation was given to the city, to be discussed at an upcoming City Council meeting:

The Downtown Fond du Lac Partnership Board of Directors supports implementing a DORA District trial season from **June 1 through September 30, 2026** in downtown Fond du Lac.

We recommend establishing a consistent and clearly communicated schedule of hours for the district of **Thursday, Friday, and Saturday from 5:00 p.m. to 11:00 p.m.** Having set hours that are posted throughout the district will help create clarity and consistency for patrons and businesses. While there has been discussion around limiting DORA use to special events only, we believe that approach could lead to confusion among the general public. Special event organizers already have the option to apply for an open intoxicants license, and some may prefer not to include alcohol as part of their events.

We recommend boundaries of **Merrill, Macy, Western/Fourth, and Marr**, which represent the central, most walkable core of the downtown entertainment district. However, we fully support establishing final boundaries based on what the Fond du Lac Police Department determines is manageable from a safety and enforcement standpoint.

The district boundaries would be clearly marked through sidewalk designations and/or signage. Patrons would be required to use designated DORA cups, and signage and informational materials would be posted at participating establishments to ensure understanding and compliance.

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BUSINESS RESOURCES

2026 GRANT PROGRAMS

- **Building Improvement Grant (BIG)** – Designed to incentivize property owners to undertake exterior property improvements, BIG is a matching grant to fund the expense of exterior renovations only. Exterior Renovations must be approved by the Downtown Architectural Review Board (DARB). Property owners may apply for up to 50% of total exterior renovation project costs with no maximum.
- **Creative Sign Grant** – Designed to incentivize property owners to add to the unique character of Downtown Fond du Lac through creative projecting sign projects, this grant reimburses up to 75% of the cost (up to \$3,000) of unique, handcrafted projecting signs, including expenses related to design, manufacturing and installation.
- **Experience Generator Grant** – Designed to attract experience-based businesses that contribute significantly to visitor and tourism spending, and the overall vibrancy and vitality of downtown Fond du Lac. This \$5,000 grant may be used for a variety of business startup expenses.
- **New Business Grant** – An incentive to assist entrepreneurs with expenses associated with starting a new or expanding business in downtown Fond du Lac. New businesses are eligible for a \$2,500 grant to be used towards business startup expenses.
- **Building Security Grant Program** – Assists property/business owners with purchasing an exterior surveillance camera system (in partnership with the FDL PD), exterior security lighting and/or a rapid entry system lock box (in partnership with the FDL FD)

For full details and contact information on the DFP grant programs listed above, visit: [Grant Programs](#)
Please email info@downtownfdl.com for more information.

SOCIAL MEDIA AUDITS

As members of a Wisconsin Main Street Community, Downtown Fond du Lac businesses are eligible to receive free website and social media audits. This assistance focuses on reviewing, evaluating, and assessing the business' website and/or social media pages. Potential reasons for a website or social media audit include a desire to revamp and/or gain an outside perspective on your website or social media accounts, to obtain assistance with social media content ideas and frequency, and/or assistance with taking over and improving a pre-existing website/social media account.

If you would like to request a website and/or social media audit, please reach out to info@downtownfdl.com.

DOWNTOWN FOND DU LAC MAPS

The DFP has a downtown map showing downtown retail, bar and restaurant businesses. Pads of 25 are available at the DFP office, or email info@downtownfdl.com if you would like one dropped off.

DOWNTOWN FOND DU LAC GIFT CHECKS

A great way to support our downtown district is to encourage your customers to purchase Downtown Fond du Lac Gift Checks to share the love with over 70 downtown businesses!

Downtown Fond du Lac Gift Checks are sold at the DFP office or online in any requested denomination and can be mailed directly to the recipient's address.

If your business would like to be included in the Downtown Fond du Lac Gift Check program, please email info@downtownfdl.com.

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OPEN FLAGS

The DFP has “OPEN” flags available for downtown businesses at no cost. The goal is to create a unified look throughout downtown and to highlight businesses that are open. If your business would like a flag, please email info@downtownfdl.com

FOND DU LAC POLICE DEPARTMENT RESOURCES

City of Fond du Lac Chief of Police, Aaron Goldstein offers the following insight and resources to the downtown business community:

- Fond du Lac Community Resource Guide, FDL PD - [English](#) and [Spanish](#)
A comprehensive guide on available Fond du Lac emergency services, mental health, abuse and juvenile and family services, and transportation resources.
- Pathways to Care - [English](#) and [Spanish](#) - A guide for navigating Fond du Lac County’s mental health services in crisis and non-crisis situations.

STAY CONNECTED

- DFP Business and Property Owners Facebook Group – This private group welcomes downtown business and property owners to discuss general downtown issues, public notices and services. [Business and Property Owners Group](#)
- Downtown Events Collaboration Team Facebook Group – This private group is a place for downtown business owners to discuss ideas to make the most out of capturing the audience of attendees at downtown special events [Downtown Events Collaboration Team](#).
- DFP Facebook Page - [DFP Facebook](#)
- DFP Instagram Page [DFP Instagram](#)
- DFP Farmers Market Facebook Page [Farmers Market Facebook](#)

BOARD MEETINGS

The DFP Board of Directors typically meets the second Wednesday of the month at 8:30 a.m. at Fox Valley Savings Bank. This meeting is open to the public. If you would like to be added to our meeting notification list, please email info@downtownfdl.com.

CONTACT US

General inquiries or responses to items from this news bulletin can be sent to info@downtownfdl.com or via phone at (920) 322-2006.

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